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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN MILITARY DOCTRINE STILL EVOLVING

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR 1.4 (D)

11. (C) Summary. The July 5 deadline President Hugo Chavez gave the Venezuelan Armed Forces to present its new doctrine has passed unfulfilled. Notwithstanding, the GOV has begun trying to prepare for "asymmetrical warfare"--and the strategy's chief corollary, the establishment of a civilian reserve force--as the National Assembly scrambles to provide the doctrine legal foundation in the Organic Law of the National Armed Forces before its recess begins August 15. The National Assembly has added to the bill the creation of a "territorial guard," an ill-defined counterpart to the reserves, which Chavez mentioned in an early June television broadcast. The GOV has had some success recruiting reserves, but numbers fall well short of the hundreds of thousands Chavez says have joined. The reserves will remain a loosely organized force as the GOV and military struggles to anticipate Chavez's wishes and to interpret his plan for a new military doctrine. End summary.

12. (U) July 5, Venezuela's independence day, passed without the planned unveiling of Venezuela's new military doctrine. The doctrine will remain unofficial until Chavez signs off on the draft, which he sent back to the military for revision, new Defense Minister Orlando Maniglia told reporters. The doctrine has not yet been codified in the Organic Law of the National Armed Forces, either. The law cleared the defense committee July 5 after two readings and now goes back to the plenary chamber, according to press reports. Opposition deputy Pedro Castillo said the pro-Chavez bloc, under pressure to pass the law quickly, agreed to an opposition request that articles relating to personnel matters be placed in another law, according to press reports.

13. (C) In the meantime, the Venezuelan armed forces have been busy defining and preparing for "asymmetric warfare" since President Hugo Chavez announced the doctrinal shift in December 2004. According to DAO reporting, the armed forces have held several conferences to plot strategies for war against an overwhelming conventional force such as the US military. A columnist in a major opposition-leaning daily newspaper released an alleged Venezuelan military plan for asymmetrical warfare in which a hypothetical "Goliath" country gathered a coalition of states to get the OAS to approve an invasion of "David." DAO and press reports also note that the military has conducted various maneuvers and exercises to prepare for guerrilla warfare. Some exercises have involved members of the new reserve force; 40 PDVSA reservists participated in an antiaircraft artillery demonstration June 9.

Reserves of the Reserves

14. (U) Venezuelan National Assembly deputies working on the draft organic law outlined the creation of a "territorial guard," which aims to involve all Venezuelan citizens, according to July 7 press reports. Chavez raised the issue of the territorial guard during his June 5 "Alo Presidente" broadcast, characterizing the force as the nation's third line of defense after the active duty military and the reserves. Pro-Chavez defense committee chairman Eddis Rios (MVR) defined the territorial guard as a "complement" to the reserves. Comparing the group to the anti-Nazi underground and the "Iraqi people," another pro-Chavez legislator described the territorial guard as a network of Venezuelans operating secretly from their homes to fight an invading force. The guard would receive "guidance" and "instruction in conversations" rather than military training, according to the deputy.

Reserve Recruitment

15. (C) The GOV, offering modest payments and free lunches, does not appear to be having difficulty recruiting reserves. Pollster Alfredo Keller told poloff 29 June that one-third of the Chavez supporters interviewed said they were prepared to join the reserves to fight the United States. Some community

leaders are supplementing the military's recruitment efforts by drumming up support for the reserves on an ad-hoc basis.

For example, the head of a pro-Chavez collective in Aragua State, claiming to have over 800 volunteers, called on locals to come out and train as reserves in mid-April. Members of GOV social missions are also enlisting in the reserve effort, according to press reports.

16. (U) Chavez, however, has wildly exaggerated the number of Venezuelan reserves. Boasting to "Alo Presidente" listeners July 3 that the US would regret any invasion of Venezuela "for 500 years," Chavez claimed his reserve force was already approaching 500,000 members while the United States had resorted to drafting civilians to support its Iraq mission. Chavez then alleged--without explaining the discrepancy--that two million Venezuelans had registered as reservists. He added July 3 that each reservist would have his own weapon, and no invader would be able to resist such a force "armed to the teeth." Other GOV reports show the actual numbers of reserves are much lower. Reserve commander Maj. Gen. Julio Quintero Vilorio announced June 9 that over 50,000 reserves would be trained during the second half of 2005, according to press reports. Navy commander Vice Admiral Armando Laguna Laguna told the press in late April the Navy currently had only 2,500 reservists.

Opposition Keeps Complaining

17. (U) Opponents of President Chavez continued to criticize the reserves primarily as a sinister force organized to keep the active duty military loyal to Chavez and to intimidate Chavez's opponents. An anti-Chavez daily argued in early June the most disturbing aspect of the draft law for GOV critics was that it placed reserves in charge of garrisons and active duty units during emergencies. Social Christian party (COPEI) secretary general Cesar Perez Vivas told reporters he expected the reserves would be used to break up street protests, noting that some reservists marching in the July 5 independence day parade carried riot gear.

Comment

18. (U) The military and local leaders have begun trying to implement the new doctrine while the National Assembly is still drafting its legal framework. All institutions involved are muddling through their attempts to define Chavez's vague plan. For example, the National Assembly's use of fudge words like "guidance" and "instruction" instead of "training" shows legislators have not fully thought out the territorial guard concept. Without clear direction, the reserve force is becoming a confusing mix of former military personnel and civilians trained either by other Chavez supporters or by soldiers whose social mission has become more important than their own military preparedness.
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